

SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN PROVINCIAL TOWNS

[FIRST SERIES]

PORPSMOUTH
WORCESTER
CAMBRIDGE

LIVERPOOL
EDINBURGH
OXFORD

LEEDS

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and importance, depend not upon commerce but upon its connection with one of the two great seats of learning in this country. If we look at the occupations which are followed by the largest number of persons in the town we see that they are due mainly to the presence of the University. In numbers the building trade comes first, railway work second, employment in the colleges third, and printing takes a very high place. The University Press is famous throughout the country for the quality of its work, and employs a large number of hands, both skilled and unskilled. Four railway companies have lines running into Cambridge, and though Cambridge has no railway works, its position makes it an important railway centre. University and college buildings are constantly arising, and the growth of the University in recent years—especially among senior resident members—has led to a large amount of house building in the suburbs. There are a great number of small industries, none of which employs a large number of hands—such as cement works, brick-making, and the manufacture of beer and aërated waters.

It will be seen that Cambridge has no large well-paid industry to depend upon, and the wages in the town are undoubtedly low as compared with other parts of the country, the wages of an unskilled labourer being only about 18s. a week. There is a considerable amount of women's work, mostly connected with the University either directly or indirectly. Between 400 and 500 women are employed in the colleges as bedmakers and helps, and besides these large numbers are engaged in laundry work or as helps in university lodging-houses. There is a large jam factory in the neighbourhood, and hundreds of women and girls travel thither daily by special train, their numbers being considerably augmented in the summer when acres of fruit have to be picked. 'Going into the gardens' affords a dove-tailing occupation for numbers of women who are thrown out of work in the long vacation. It will be easily realised that much of the work here described is irregular in character. This applies especially to building and its allied trades, to all work connected with the University, and to the jam factory. Building is to a certain extent a seasonal trade everywhere, and calls for no special remark, but Cambridge University in its alternations of term

and vacation places the worker in a peculiarly disadvantageous position. And it must be remembered also that the mere presence of four thousand young men for half the year gives rise to an enormous amount of labour of the most casual description. ‘He runs after the gentlemen’s cabs at the beginning and end of term,’ was the answer given quite seriously to an enquiry of an aged woman as to her son’s occupation. Besides cab-running there are many services which bring ‘the quick shilling’—minding bicycles, picking up balls, selling plants, and carrying bags. Cabmen, newspaper sellers, and many men who are attached to billiard-rooms, shops, or restaurants also suffer keenly from the drop in the services required of them during the vacations. The result is that there are many men who have no regular employment but merely lead a hand-to-mouth existence in the way described. It is right to add that the two large markets, which are held in Cambridge each week, also make a considerable demand on the casual workers, and add to the inducement to many to pick up a livelihood by odd jobs. Partly a cause and partly an effect of this excess of casual labour is the large amount of women’s labour; no doubt many families are kept going more by the earnings of the wife, which are small but comparatively regular, than by the odd shillings brought in by the husband. A woman can find work in college or laundry or factory, and can thus manage to keep the wolf from the door even when the man’s earnings fail almost completely, but families maintained in this way suffer considerably in the vacations when the woman’s wages will be much reduced if they do not cease altogether. Some colleges have recently much improved the conditions under which their women employees work; the women are paid regularly the whole year round—in vacation as well as in term—and the old system, whereby the lowest grade of college servants, known as helps, are engaged and paid by the upper servants, has been abolished. There is no doubt that college work is suitable for women and is probably better done by them than it is by men, and if the general standard of wages and conditions of work could be raised to the point which has been reached in some cases, it should be of great advantage to the workers. It has certain features which differentiate it from ordinary work in

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shop or factory; though the hours are early—starting at 6 a.m.—they are short and the afternoon is mostly quite free. The women are at liberty to take away with them what is left of milk and bread and other articles of food, but the amount available in this way is said to be much less than formerly on account of the large number of undergraduates who live simply and economically. College work is, of course, specially suitable for widows or for women whose children have grown up and no longer need their constant care. It is an undoubted evil that owing to the want of employment among men such large numbers of young married women are obliged to go out to work, thus neglecting their homes and children. There seems no remedy for this beyond improving the conditions of men's employment, and if possible reducing the supply of casual labourers; any attempt to solve the problem by merely curtailing the employment of married women would be to begin at the wrong end, and would probably cause more suffering than it would alleviate.

Other factors in Cambridge which contribute to a low standard of life are bad housing and sanitation in some quarters and also the very large number of public-houses. About six years ago an exhaustive inquiry was made into the housing conditions of the town, the results of which were far from satisfactory. Over 2,000 of the poorest houses were investigated, with the result (to quote the report) that 'very nearly one-half of the persons with whom our report deals may be said to be living under conditions of crowding, and just about a quarter of this whole number live under conditions where the crowding begins to be serious.' A considerable number of houses were also found to be in bad repair and having no separate water supply or sanitary accommodation. There has been much improvement in recent years in these respects, and in many cases sanitary arrangements have been brought up to date; but there still remain courts and yards in which the most undesirable families tend to congregate, where conditions are in every way bad, and should not be allowed to continue. It is difficult to take drastic action with regard to the demolition of these as there is said to be a deficiency in small cottages at a low rent. But no town authorities should suffer a deadlock of this kind to continue, as they now have powers to

erect cottages where they consider there is a real need for them. It is impossible to exaggerate the evil effects of bad housing on the health and morals of the people. Infection spreads with doubled rapidity in slum areas; insanitary conditions are said by authorities to be the most potent cause of infant mortality; and the moral ruin often caused by over-crowding in bedrooms at night by persons of both sexes and all ages is terrible to contemplate.

Cottage rents are decidedly low in Cambridge as compared with other towns; the average rent of a three-roomed house is 2*s.* 11*d.* a week, four-roomed 3*s.* 8*d.*, five-roomed 4*s.* 3*d.*, and six-roomed 4*s.* 7*d.*

Cambridge is exceptional in the number of its public-houses. The average of licensed premises to population in England and Wales is 1 to 230, but in Cambridge it is 1 to 138. In one street, in a distance of considerably less than half a mile, there are 22 public-houses. There can be no doubt that these excessive opportunities for drinking have a very deleterious effect on the population generally. Men and women are surrounded by temptations, and that chiefly in the poorer districts where there are fewer attractions of other kinds. The supervision of the police is also made more difficult by the number of premises they are called upon to supervise. It is much to be deplored that public opinion cannot assert itself on this question sufficiently to secure an adequate reduction of licenses. There may not be more convictions for drunkenness in Cambridge than there are in towns of similar size which have a smaller number of public-houses, but there is undoubtedly a large amount of excessive drinking among both men and women, with all its attendant evils of ill-health and poverty and enfeebled character and will.

We may now turn to the various agencies which are at work in Cambridge to cope with some of the bad conditions which have been described, and we may first turn to those dealing with unemployment. It has already been stated that a large number of families in the town just manage to keep going in normal times, but if illness comes or exceptionally severe weather, they are thrown upon the Poor Law or charity. To help families such as these by providing work for the man has been the aim of many unemployment schemes all

over the country. In Cambridge the efforts have been two-fold—that of the Corporation and the Botanic Garden Employment Scheme. The Town Council has from time to time during the winter season taken on extra men beyond its ordinary staff to do necessary work of a simple character. The men have been selected largely on account of the size of their families or the length of time they have been out of work; they have been engaged for short periods of usually not more than three weeks, and have been employed for three or four days in each week at a low wage. Men are taken on again for a further period more than once if room can be found for them, but the object is to spread the work over as many needy cases as possible. The men are taken on at the Corporation offices, and many go especially at the beginning of the week on the chance of getting employment. The Botanic Garden scheme is a private effort, which was started originally by a charitable lady who felt that something must be done to provide work for the large numbers of men who applied to her for help on the grounds that they could not find it for themselves. Men are employed in the Garden throughout the winter—usually about thirty at a time—on useful work which could not be afforded out of the ordinary income. The scheme in this way possesses one great advantage which is not possessed by all unemployment schemes, that by it work is done which adds to the usefulness and beauty of a valuable institution, which would not otherwise be done at all, and which is continuous in character in that it can be carried on year after year. The men are usually sent by subscribers to the fund, and are then employed to the amount of the subscription with the sanction of the Curator by whom the scheme is managed. There is also a general fund on which men are employed who are selected by the Curator out of the large number who apply to him. The tendency is for the same men to be employed one winter after another, and thus to rely on the fund to provide them with regular winter employment. This is especially the case with men in seasonal trades, such as painters, who receive a comparatively high wage in summer, but are always out of work for part of the winter. It should be said that each man is employed for four days in the week, and usually for only a few weeks at

a time. It will readily be seen that the fatal defect of any such scheme as those described is, that it provides what has been called a homœopathic cure for casual labour. It attempts to cure the evil of casual labour by providing more casual labour. It exactly suits the men who have already become demoralised by discontinuous work with frequent intervals of idleness, by providing them with more work of the same character. One cannot but realise the utility of such schemes as palliatives to obviate suffering which might otherwise occur, and also as preventing the recourse to the Poor Law, to which some families otherwise would be driven, and it is possible that relief given in the form of work to the man—under any conditions—may be less harmful than relief given in the form of food or money, for which no equivalent is asked. One cannot regard them as offering any real solution to the problem with which we are dealing, and one looks with much more hope and confidence to two other methods of solving the question which may be mentioned. A Labour Exchange has recently been opened in Cambridge, and though the time has so far been too short for any definite statements to be made as to the result, yet the signs are in every way hopeful. It is interesting to note in connection with what has been said with regard to occupations in Cambridge, that of the men applying for work, 25 per cent. have been connected with the building trade, 20 per cent. with conveyance in one form or another, and 12 per cent. with domestic work. The number of women seeking work has up to the present been small, but the experience has been the same as in other exchanges, that vacancies for women in various skilled trades are notified for which it is impossible to find the women, whereas the supply of women for domestic work usually exceeds the demand. One even dares to hope that in the future the Labour Exchange will not be content with the bringing together of employer and employed, but may even attempt to decasualise labour, and thus to remove what is perhaps the main cause of poverty and destitution. Even if nothing very effective can be done to improve the present generation of casual labourers, we may help to stop the supply of them in the future, and it was largely with this end in view that the Juvenile Employment Registry was established four years ago. It was felt that in a

large number of cases a lad took to odd jobbing at eighteen or nineteen because he had never learned to do anything else, and had outgrown the boy's work to which he went on leaving school. The Registry attempts to place all boys which apply to it in occupations which will afford them a permanent means of livelihood in the future, and to encourage them to fit themselves in every possible way during the years of adolescence for the work of life. Efforts of this kind are specially needed in a place like Cambridge, where there are no large works employing numbers of men and boys and where there are innumerable occupations which offer easy employment for a young lad. The Registry works in close co-operation with both the Labour Exchange and also the Education Committee. The head masters and mistresses regularly send lists of the boys and girls who are leaving school so that they may be visited and advised by the Registry workers. Last year no fewer than 105 boys and girls were actually placed by its agency, while many more received advice and information.

One naturally looks in considering the social welfare of a town to the work among the children, and it is to that that we may next turn. The death rate of infants under one year in Cambridge in the year 1910 was 76 per 1,000 births, and shows a considerable decrease on the two previous years, in which the rate was 83 and 135. This is no doubt partly due to the cool weather of the last two summers, but also in great part to the admirable system of health visiting which ensures that every infant is visited by a skilled and trained worker within a few weeks of its birth. It is hoped in this way, not only to check infantile mortality, but also to prevent those who survive from growing up with their constitutions enfeebled through early neglect or mismanagement. No relief is given in connection with the visiting, but meals are provided at an eating house for nursing and expectant mothers at a reduced cost, and there is a milk depot at which pasteurised milk is provided for infants, the mothers paying the bare cost of the milk. The three Health Visitors are controlled and financed by a voluntary committee, while they work under the direction of the Medical Officer of Health. It is hoped that in the future Cambridge, following the example of other progressive municipalities, will take over the financial respon-

sibility for this work. The Borough Council has not on the whole taken a progressive line in the matter of municipal undertakings. Trams, gas, and water are all supplied by private companies. There is at present no provision for consumptive patients beyond that of the Workhouse Infirmary; the death rate from tuberculosis in 1910 was 1.13 per 1,000 living. There are no public baths or wash-houses, though there are bathing-places in the river, which are extensively used by men and boys, and—as is less common—separate and free facilities for bathing in the river have also been provided for women and girls. The town is specially well supplied with commons and open spaces, and is on the whole healthy; the death rate from all causes was 12.6 per 1,000 in 1910 as against 13.5 in 1909. Cambridge possesses a very valuable institution in Addenbrooke's Hospital, where medical advice and treatment of the very first rank are available for the poor. The number of in-patients in 1910 was 1,768, and of out-patients 9,733. The hospital unfortunately maintains the unsatisfactory system of subscribers' letters, one of which a person has to obtain before he can be accepted either as an indoor or outdoor patient. This system may entail suffering on a sick person who has to tramp about to get a letter when quite unfit to do so, and at the same time does not ensure that the recipient is a fit and proper person—whether financially or physically—for hospital treatment. It is much to be wished that Addenbrooke's would follow the example of other well managed hospitals, and appoint a qualified almoner who would secure that the benefits of the hospital were enjoyed only by those who really needed them, and—as is even more important—would follow up the patients in their own homes and see that the advice of the doctor was carried out. There is a Provident Medical Institution in Cambridge with over 1,200 members, by which persons whose income is below 25s. a week can secure a doctor and medicine in illness at a cost of 4d. a month for adults and 2d. a month for children. With the Poor Law doctor for the poorest members of the community, the free out-patients department for those who need surgical treatment or the advice of a specialist, and the Provident Medical for the average labourer and his family, there ought to be a fairly complete organisation to provide medical attendance for

those who cannot afford a private doctor, and yet unfortunately through want of organisation there is overlapping, and at the same time deficiency. Many persons drift vaguely to and fro between the hospital and the parish doctor; some who are actually in receipt of relief manage to save the few pence necessary for membership of the Provident Medical; others who have failed to join the club, though quite able to do so, find themselves in time of illness unable to pay a doctor's fee, and either fail to obtain medical advice at all or apply to the Relieving Officer, and thus needlessly take the first step to pauperism.

To return to the children—Cambridge never had a School Board and since 1902 the Council has only built one new school; in some cases the school buildings are old and unsuitable for their purpose and there is no special provision for the mentally defective. Medical inspection is working well under the Medical Officer of Health, and is supplemented by the newly established Care Committees, one of whose duties it is to see that the treatment recommended by the doctor at the inspection is carried out. Cambridge was one of the first towns to appoint a school nurse to work under the doctor and to visit the children in their own homes. Such work as this is chiefly valuable in so far as the co-operation of the parents can be secured in the efforts which the school authority makes for the child's welfare, and the importance of working through the home as well as through the school cannot be too often insisted upon. Cambridge was a pioneer in the work of school dentistry; the dental clinic was originally started by the generosity of a private individual, but its success was so great that the Education Committee took it over at the end of two years, and it is now financed entirely by the town. The number of children treated in 1910 was 1,651; the treatment is entirely free, except in the case of one fee-paying school, where an attempt has been made to charge a small fee, and on the whole the parents are very ready to take advantage of it. The dentist has found considerable difficulty in getting the children to use their tooth brushes regularly, even when they possess them, and one of the School Care Committees is endeavouring to assist the work by supplying brushes to the children at wholesale prices, and if possible

keeping them up to the regular use of them. For medical treatment the children go to their own doctors or to the hospital, and spectacles are supplied to necessitous cases by the Charity Organisation Society. Bye-laws have recently been made to restrict the hours of labour permitted to children below the age of fourteen, and if only public opinion can secure their enforcement much premature toil with resultant evils to the health and morals of young people ought to be prevented.

There are associations of various kinds which provide amusement and occupation for growing girls and boys, and offer some alternative for the dissipation and danger of the streets. Evening classes and lectures have hitherto not been so successful in Cambridge as might have been expected in a University town. It is difficult to estimate what effect the fact that Cambridge is an intellectual centre has had upon the town population. The direct effect is probably nil, or at least there is nothing that we can estimate. A certain number of undergraduates give personal help to some of the agencies which are at work in the town which especially appeal to men, and help of this kind—though it suffers from the disadvantage that the individuals are constantly changing—is a valuable asset which few towns can enjoy. There is undoubtedly among some of the artisans a vague feeling of resentment against the University. They have an idea that its influence has been exerted to keep railway works and other large industrial undertakings out of the town, and that this is not by any means compensated for by the trade that the University brings into it. They also resent the disturbance of trade due to the recurrence of term and vacation, the irregular employment, the demand for small services on the part of undergraduates which leads to a cadging spirit eager for a tip, the ill effects of the example of extravagance and amusement, over-eating, over-drinking, and gambling which must occur to a certain extent in a University town. There is, of course, something to be said on the other side, but this aspect of the case must not be overlooked.

To continue our account of social effort in Cambridge we may say that it is a town of much charity. There are many endowed and parochial charities and much individual alms-

giving. To cure the overlapping which undoubtedly exists, a scheme for the registration of relief has recently been started. How necessary this is will be understood from the following example which recently occurred. A child suffering from hip disease was brought to the notice of the Charity Organisation Society by the school nurse as he had been forbidden to attend school. The case was a particularly necessitous one, as the child was motherless and neglected by his remaining parent. He attended the hospital, and the authorities there had recommended that he should be sent to a special hospital. The district nurse was attending the child to give professional aid; the inspector of the N.S.P.C.C. had been called in on account of alleged neglect; the Invalid Children's Aid Association had the child's name upon its books, and the Health Visitor had visited the home for years, and knew the child well, and it was through her agency that he was finally sent to a suitable institution. This was not a case in which relief was being given in money or in kind, but one in which no less than seven agencies, each of which undertakes as part of its work the care of suffering children, were attempting to help a single child. It was happily possible in this instance—chiefly through the medium of the Charity Organisation Society—for the various organisations to communicate with and assist one another, and the final end was satisfactorily attained. There are many other families which need help of another kind into which charity may flow from half a dozen different sources; from societies and individuals, as well as from the parish. This is not only wasteful and demoralising, but it often prevents any real good from being done, as no one takes up the case adequately or with a sense of responsibility, but each has a vague feeling that some one else may be doing something more effectual. As public opinion on the subject of charity becomes more enlightened, the system of registration will become more and more valuable, and it is hopeful that already people are beginning to feel dissatisfaction at working in the dark and to be anxious for fuller knowledge. The registration of relief was an outcome of the Charity Organisation Society, as have been many other new developments of social work in Cambridge. The local Charity Organisation Society has never been satisfied with acting as a relief agency, but has

been instrumental in starting new agencies with a view to making its own relief work less necessary in the future. Such have been the Juvenile Employment Registry, the Invalid Children's Aid Association, with which is connected a school of needlework for crippled girls, the collection of savings by house to house visiting, and a committee for the care of the feeble-minded. The new work has in each case been financed by the Charity Organisation Society and organised by a sub-committee, but in each case as the work develops it becomes independent of the parent society. The experience and knowledge of the Charity Organisation Society are thus secured in the initial stages, but when the new organisation has been fairly started, it is found best for it to be as independent as possible.

No account of relief agencies in Cambridge would be complete without some mention of the work of the Guardians. The elections to the Board are managed mainly by the party organisations, but the voting at the Board meetings seldom goes on party lines. The University is hardly represented at all on the Board; there are three women members. The workhouse and infirmary buildings are old and inconvenient, and the arrangements and equipment are not on modern lines. Orphan or deserted children are boarded out in the country; a considerable residuum remain in the House, but there is a prospect that the Guardians may provide for them outside the House in the near future. The Board has a reputation for careful administration, but the number of paupers (leaving out of account the reduction due to Old Age Pensions) has increased slightly of recent years. The population of the parish is the same as of the Borough; the number of workhouse inmates is 192, and of out-paupers 320. An aged person usually receives 3s. 6d. a week, but there are many cases in which more is given; in the same way there is a 'scale' for widows — 1s. 6d. a week for each child after the first—but frequently where the woman is delicate or there is a young baby, the scale is widely departed from. The Guardians have recently adopted the case-paper system and abolished pay-stations; there are friendly relations between the Guardians and the Charity Organisation Society, and the fortnightly relief lists are sent to the Registrar. In spite of this the administration of

relief is hampered by the amount of unorganised private charity of which the poor are the recipients, as the knowledge of this leads the Guardians in assessing the relief to 'leave room for private charity,' as it has been expressed, and the result is that begging and cadging are actually encouraged. There is urgent need of closer co-operation on the part of the Guardians with both voluntary agencies and also with other public authorities.

To sum up, there is in Cambridge much irregularity of work and resultant poverty; there are bad conditions of life, with their inevitable effects of enfeebled health and child suffering. There is much charity and desire to help—to a large extent irresponsible and unorganised, and confined, it is to be feared, only to one section of the community. There is also a slowly forming public opinion that the relief of suffering demands a wise charity well organised; there is an awakening on the part of public authorities to the ever-widening powers they hold for social betterment; there is a keener conscience as to conditions of labour and the wiser and fuller training of the young; there is more civic pride in and responsibility for making Cambridge the town worthy of the great University which bears its name.

CLARA DOROTHEA RACKHAM.

IV. LIVERPOOL.

LIVERPOOL, second only to London in size among the English towns, has a population of some 750,000. If the adjoining boroughs of Bootle on the same side of the river, and of Birkenhead and Wallasey on the opposite bank, together with the outlying residential suburbs of Waterloo, Litherland, Blundellsands and the Wirral generally, be added, the population amounts to well over a million.

The town, which received its Charter from King John, had in 1700 a population of 5000. This began to rise rapidly in the eighteenth century. In 1802 it was 60,000, in 1831 it was 165,000, in 1901 it was 716,000.

The river front consists of some six miles of docks in the